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RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 0371  
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SUBJECT: CHINESE MFA HOSTS VISA CONFERENCE: MANTIS SAOS, REFUSAL RATES, AND FINGERPRINTS

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) organized a visa conference in Guangzhou on December 2-4 to discuss U.S. visa policy. Consistent with previous visa conferences, the

main issues on the Chinese side were complaints about the length of time to process Mantis security advisory opinion (SAO) requests, wait times for interviews, refusal rates, fingerprint requirements, and communication with applicants who are subject to administrative processing. Mission China cited major reductions in SAO processing time over the past year, the new Consulate building in Guangzhou which is scheduled for completion in 2013, and the scheduled release of the DS-160 online application as examples of our ongoing effort and commitment to improving service and efficiency. In response, the Shanghai Foreign Affairs Office (FAO) requested formal instruction on the DS-160 online application. The MFA will likely continue to press us to finish processing Mantis SAOs within ten working days, to exempt more high-level applicants from fingerprints requirement, and to share the specific reasons applicants are denied visas after undergoing administrative processing. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) The Chinese participants, headed by Mr. Wang Xiang Yang, the Director of the Visa Division at the Consular Department of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), included representatives from the Foreign Affairs Office (FAO) of the provinces of Anhui, Guangdong, Guizhou, Hunan, Jiangsu, Shanghai, Shanxi, Yunnan, and Zhejiang; the Ministries of Civil Affairs, Commerce, Defense, Education, Finance, Public Health, and Railways; and multiple state-owned enterprises including Air China, the Bank of China, China Telecom, the Chinese Academy of Science and Social Sciences, the General Administration of Civil Aviation of China (CAAC), the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC), the National Energy Bureau, Shandong Airlines Co., and the ZTE Corporation.

¶3. (U) In his opening remarks, Mr. Wang described the U.S.-Sino relationship as 'steady' and praised the 'positive progress' in trade and commercial issues between the two countries in recent years. He highlighted the recent Presidential visit and meetings between U.S. and Chinese officials in Beijing as a symbol of the important role that U.S.-Sino cooperation is playing in international affairs. Mr. Wang stated that in order to facilitate the people-to-people contact that President Obama had emphasized during his recent visit, the U.S. missions in China should reduce the time it takes to process Mantis SAOs. He noted that it still takes approximately one month for Chinese applicants with a scientific or technical background to undergo administrative processing and requested Mission China to finish administrative processing for these applicants within ten working days. Mr. Wang stated that the MFA looks forward to maintaining 'friendly cooperation' and 'close communication' with the U.S. missions in China.

¶4. (U) The U.S. participants consisted of the Consular Section Chief and the NIV Unit Chief in Guangzhou, the NIV Unit Chief in Beijing, the Deputy NIV Unit Chief in Shanghai, and three Vice

Consuls. The Consular Section Chief in Guangzhou noted that 85% of the applicants for a F-1 visa are successful and that the average processing time for applications from FAO is one working day. He noted that only about 3% of FAO applicants end up requiring administrative processing which now takes only an average of two to three weeks. The Consular Section Chief cited the new Consulate building in Guangzhou which is scheduled for completion in 2013 and which will house 22 more public service windows (i.e. from 43 to 65) as one example of mission China's effort and commitment to improving service and efficiency.

15. (U) As another example of our commitment to improving service and efficiency, the NIV Unit Chief in Guangzhou highlighted the scheduled release of the DS-160 online application on 01 March 2010.

He noted that the DS-160 online application may reduce the need to return to the Embassy or a Consulate for successive interviews and that since the DS-160 enables us to conduct the pre-processing and the pre-screening of data in advance of interviews, processing delays will likely be reduced. He also reminded participants that applicants who were issued a full validity visa within the last 12 months can save time by using the drop box system. In addition, the Guangzhou NIV Unit Chief noted that Mission China as a whole approves about 82% of B1/B2 visa applicants and about 96% of applicants from FAO. He noted that some problems with FAO applicants include the usage of fake invitation letters, the omission from application forms or the denial during interviews of having family in the United States, and requests for special favors for their non-FAO friends or relatives.

16. (U) During the Q&A session, a ICBC representative asserted that applicants who are subject to administrative processing should receive clear communication of this. Representatives from Air China and Shangdong Airlines asserted that the wait time for interviews needs to be reduced further and that more high-level applicants should be exempted from the requirement for interviews and fingerprints. An official from the Shanghai FAO reminded us that FAO applicants were already examined and approved by the Chinese government to carry out official business. Therefore, when a FAO applicant is denied a visa, the FAO would like to know the reason for the denial so that they can better screen their applicants. In addition, FAO requested some type of formal instruction on the DS-160 online application so that they can in turn provide training to their applicants.

17. (U) In response to these questions, the U.S. participants stated that every applicant who is subject to administrative processing knows about it because they are told of it at the time of the interview. The U.S. side also stated its willingness to move up interview dates for certain applicants who have urgent travel plans and emphasized the importance for applicants to make it clear with MFA, not with them, if their travels are urgent. Due to privacy concerns, the U.S. will not share personal information with the FAO.

It is important to note, however, that applications are refused based on the individual applicant and not on the affiliated agency or enterprise, and that, in the end, 98% of those who undergo administrative processing are approved for a visa. Mission China also concurred that some type of formal instruction for the FAO on the DS-160 online application would be useful.

18. (U) In his concluding remarks, Mr. Wang reiterated that administrative processing should not be an obstacle to people-to-people contact. The United States remains the most important destination for public affairs delegations from China. He claimed that the 18% refusal rate is still high and urged the U.S. to further reduce the refusal rate and the number of people who are subject to administrative processing.

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